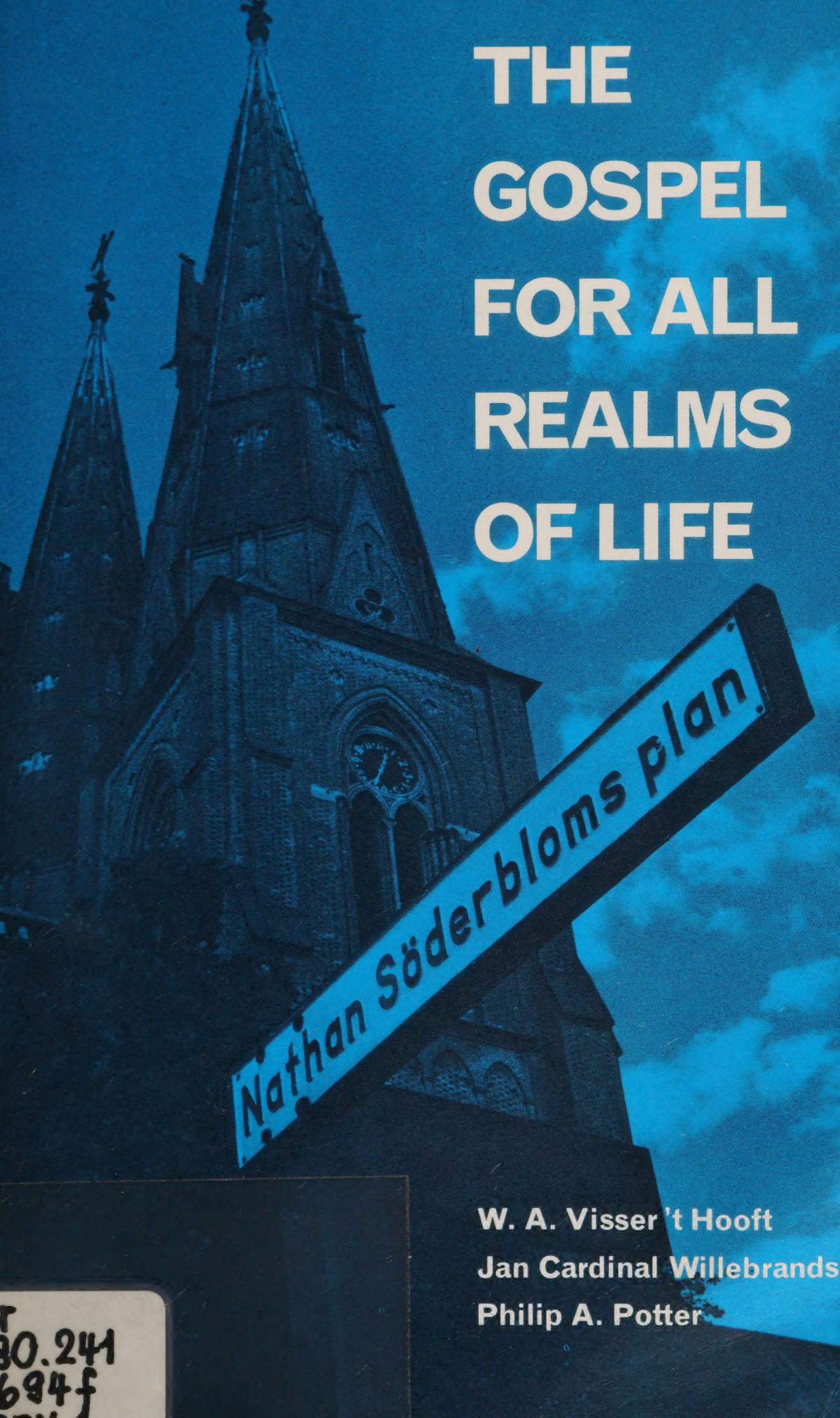
THE GOSPEL FOR ALL REALMS OF LIFE



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reflections on the
Universal Christian Conference
on Life and Work, Stockholm 1925

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contents

Introduction v

The historical significance of Stockholm 1925 . . . 1
W. A. Visser 't Hooft

Christian unity and the Kingdom of God 17
Jan Cardinal Willebrands

Christian life and work fifty years after Stockholm . 21
Philip A. Potter

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introduction

It is not uncommon for ecumenical conferences to be remembered for what they have not said rather than for what they actually said. Thus, the sentence most frequently quoted with reference to the first Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, Stockholm 1925: " Service unites—doctrine divides ", does not appear anywhere in the conference report.

On the other hand, it took more than a generation to rediscover one of the central thrusts of the Stockholm conference which the message of the meeting puts in the phrase: " The nearer we draw to the Crucified, the nearer we come to one another."

This booklet is not a purely historical study of the Stockholm meeting in 1925. Rather, it attempts to rediscover the significance of the conference in the light of the ecumenical situation fifty years later. The three essays were delivered as addresses in the context of a celebration held at Stockholm in September 1975 in commemoration of this first ecumenical conference of churches.

The authors of this booklet do not need to be introduced to the reader. But the very fact of their reflections being published together is in itself an ecumenical event. Dr Visser 't Hooft was for almost thirty years General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, for which the foundations were laid at Stockholm, and of which he now is the Honorary President. He, more than anyone else, is qualified to attempt this reappropriation of the tradition of Stockholm.

The two other authors represent in their very persons the ecumenical movement of our time. Jan Cardinal Willebrands, President of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian

Unity, speaks for the Roman Catholic Church which, in the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council published almost forty years after Stockholm, expressed its commitment to the ecumenical movement, thus giving in itself an important example for the reappraisal of history.

And finally, Dr Philip Potter, present General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, writes as a member of the generation for whom the fifty years since Stockholm are not only an essential part of their personal life history but a living memory and a continuing challenge. He also speaks for that ecumenical movement in which now Christians and churches from the so-called Third World are playing a vital part and " are enabling the movement to be truly ecumenical, that is, concerned with the whole inhabited earth ".

It is no surprise that giving thanks for what was begun in Stockholm in 1925 and for what has taken place in the fifty years since then should focus attention particularly on the person of Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931), that great Lutheran leader of the ecumenical movement. The Stockholm Conference was his work. Fifty years later his basic convictions and motivations in calling the Conference remain as valid and as challenging as they were in his time: the call to repentance, the emphasis on the Cross of Jesus Christ as the centre of Christian unity, and the conviction that the Gospel of Christ is addressed to all realms of life.

It is a revealing experience to look at some of the recent debates concerning the direction of the ecumenical movement in the light of these early stages. Many of the issues " which are often considered to be issues of the 60s or 70s were already acute at the time of Stockholm " (Visser 't Hooft). However, the situation of our world today is much more dramatic and the issues more complex. It is therefore fitting that these reflections on the history of Christian life and work since Stockholm should close with a call to " dedicate ourselves anew in the power and fellowship of the Holy Spirit, that we may become the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church for the sake of God's Kingdom and his righteousness ". (Philip Potter).

October 1975

KONRAD RAISER
Deputy General Secretary, WCC

the historical significance of Stockholm 1925

W. A. Visser 't Hooft

Is there anything more to be said about the Stockhom Conference of 1925? Has that meeting not been sufficiently eulogized, analysed, criticized? What can we add to that mass of information?

Certainly not much in the way of an eye witness. Yes, I was there, but it was half a century ago and " old men forget ". Moreover I was a brand new YMCA secretary, 24 years old, miraculously admitted as a substitute delegate, and I therefore had to keep rather quiet. I have of course retained some mental pictures: the solemn procession on the opening day (top hats were still *de rigueur*), the Communion service in the Engelbert Church, Nathan Söderblom literally running through a city street with his hair dancing in the wind, the candlelight dinner in the City Hall with its fine mosaics, the Franco-German debate in which Elie Gounelle pleaded with outstretched arms for reconciliation. But I knew at that time far too little about the life of the Church in various parts of the world to understand the full significance of the meeting. Like most other West Europeans, I had only the vaguest ideas about eastern orthodoxy or about the social gospel in the USA. So it was a long time before I began to see the real importance of the Stockholm Conference.

In other words, the Stockholm Conference began to look differently as I learned more about the ecumenical situation. So here we have a good reason for taking another look at Stockholm. It is meaningful to ask: as our ecumenical experience becomes wider and deeper, do we not learn to understand better what happened at Stockholm?

This is all the more true since at the time of the Stockholm Conference very few people understood the nature of an ecumenical conference of the churches. It was a new phenomenon in modern history and it could therefore not be interpreted in the known categories of classification and judgment. Those who looked at it through their national or confessional glasses only

saw a caricature, not the complicated, but also rich, reality. We are in a different position and can study the Stockholm Conference in the light of the later ecumenical gatherings.

But that is not all. We should not only see Stockholm in the light of later ecumenical history, we should also look at our present ecumenical situation in the light of Stockholm. For this will help us to discover that certain issues which are often considered to be issues of the sixties or seventies were already acute at that time. And we can learn useful lessons from the experience of the pioneers.

Church and world in the 1920s

Now in order to understand the historical significance of the Stockholm Conference we must first of all visualize the world of 1925. That is not easy for it was in many important respects quite different—not only from the world of the 1970s but even from the world of the 1930s.

First of all, it was a world of two half continents: North America and Europe minus Russia, for (with the exception of Japan) the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America did not yet play an active role and did not yet share in the international decision-making processes. The USSR was looked upon as a member of the family that had gone wrong and could not be readmitted until it had changed its ways.

But in the second place within this small, mostly Atlantic world there was the sharp contrast between the mood of the victorious and the defeated nations. On the one hand a wave of idealism, very strong in the USA but also quite widespread in Britain, France and the neutral nations: in spite of Woodrow Wilson's failure with regard to American membership in the League of Nations, his vision of a completely democratic and pacific world lived on. Tremendous expectations were focused on the League of Nations, for was it not to inaugurate a new international order in which war would be outlawed? In the year of " Stockholm " the negotiations between Briand, Stresemann and Chamberlain preceding the conclusion of the Locarno Treaty seemed to show that the world was at last moving in the right direction. But on the other hand, the mood of the defeated: to them all this talk about peace was sheer hypocrisy. Was not the League simply an alliance of victorious nations based on the falsehood that Germany alone had been guilty for the outbreak of World War I? In this setting the prophets of total pessimism flourished. Oswald Spengler predicted the doom of western civilization (not simply its decline as the English title, *Decline of the West*, would seem to indicate). In the light of his heroic fatalism the dreams about peace and democracy seemed childish and naive.

And what about the churches? During the war years the churches of the nations involved in the war had embraced the national cause to such an

extent that they had forgotten the supra-national calling of the Church. The story of Nathan Söderblom's attempts during the war to remind the churches of their common responsibility, which Nils Karlstrom has told us, is really a tragedy because of the lack of vision of the national churches. Fortunately, as in all good tragedy the courage of the hero brings in the element of catharsis. So after the war the churches were not only very ignorant about each other, but what they knew about each other was often wrong, because it was largely based on political propaganda. Western and eastern churches knew about each other's past, but not about each other's present. The contact between East and West which the thinkers of the Russian emigration would make belongs to the period after Stockholm. European churches knew next to nothing about American churches, for it was supposed that America had no history and why study churches without history? Adolf Keller's book about American Christianity was a first attempt to fill the information vacuum. [1]

It must also be noted that with regard to the subject matter of the Stockholm Conference, the churches were not on the same wavelength. In the USA the themes of social ethics and social action had been the chief items on the agenda of the churches cooperating in the Federal Council since the creation of that body. At the first meeting of the Council in 1908 a statement on " The social ideals of the churches " (later also called " The social creed ") was adopted. In those years Walter Rauschenbusch's writings with their " theology for the social gospel " exerted a wide influence. In 1911 and 1912 the Men and Religion Movement had, as Rauschenbusch himself put it, "made social Christianity orthodox ". And the post-war climate in the USA gave the social gospel the golden opportunity to reach out to the ends of the earth through missions, youth movements, peace crusades and relief agencies. In Great Britain social concern in the churches had also had a history of several decades. Churchmen, first of all of the Free Churches, later also of the Church of England, had played a prominent part in the development of the labour movement and the Labour Party. By 1919 this social concern had sufficiently matured to begin preparations for a national inter-church Conference on Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) which was held in 1924 under the chairmanship of William Temple and showed clearly that Christians of different denominations and with different theological opinions could render a common witness with regard to the problems of society.

In Germany the situation was very different. It is true that German scholars such as Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber had made decisive and permanently valuable contributions to Christian social thought. But this was rather in the form of historical analysis than of constructive proposals. And those who had a specific social programme were divided and did not carry the churches with them. Conservatives like Stoecker, liberals like Harnack and Siegmund Schultze, religious socialists like Blumhardt and Paul Tillich (influenced by

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[1] ADOLF KELLER: *Dynamis, Formen und Kräfte des Amerikanischen Protestantismus.* Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1922.

Ragaz and Kutter in Switzerland), dialectical theologians like Barth, Gogarten, Brunner, Thurneysen, each had their own platform. And none of those groups met with a widespread response.

True motivation of the organizers

I have reminded you briefly about these aspects of the situation of Church and world in the 1920s in order to underline the enormous difficulty of the task which the organizers of Stockholm 1925 took upon their shoulders. Wise men everywhere warned Söderblom that what he was trying to do was quite impossible. Randal Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury, considered the Life and Work plan as " somewhat vague and visionary ". Archbishop Johansson of Turku, Finland, warned the world against a meeting which according to his opinion Martin Luther would not have attended. But Söderblom went straight ahead. George Bell, who knew what he was talking about since he had seen Söderblom at work in various places, said later: " The more I think of the difficulties of those early days, between 1920 and 1925, the greater is my sense of the triumph of Nathan Söderblom. "[2] He adds that Söderblom received help from various sides and especially from the American churches. That is true. Henry Atkinson was elected General Secretary of the Conference committee in 1922 and took over a good part of the organizational task. But since he held at the same time the executive direction of the Church Peace Union and of the World Alliance for Promoting Friendship Through the Churches, he could only give part-time service. This, together with the fact that Söderblom had now become known as the real pioneer, architect and spiritual father of Life and Work, meant that Uppsala in those years of preparation was not only the home of the president but also the place to which all interested in the Conference looked for guidance and inspiration. Fortunately Yngve Brilioth, with his excellent knowledge of the ecumenical situation, was available to help the Archbishop.

At this point we should ask what were the main motives which inspired Söderblom and his colleagues in this great undertaking. The question is important because several misunderstandings have arisen in this connection. Thus Pater Max Pribilla in his very able and on the whole well documented book *Um kirchliche Einheit* [3] raises the question whether the deepest meaning of the Stockholm Conference for Söderblom was not to serve as one great demonstration of World Protestantism against Rome. Even if we did not have Söderblom's answer to this interpretation of his motives, we would be able to say that Pribilla was quite wrong on this point. For we remember how Söderblom fought in 1920 at Geneva for extending an invitation to Rome and against a merely pan-Protestant conception of the coming meeting. But we have also the pages in which Söderblom speaks with impressive indignation and obvious sincerity of the terrible misunderstanding that he

[2] George Bell: *Christian Unity: the Anglican Position.* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1948, p. 157.

[3] Max Pribilla: *Um kirchliche Einheit.* Freiburg in Br.: Herder, 1929.

should have gone through such deep agony of the spirit and accepted such burdens for no other purpose but to embarrass the Roman Church. This answer to Pribilla is conclusive and gives us deep insight into Söderblom's true motives.

The deepest of these motives is surely that of repentance. Ever since the Uppsala meeting of neutral churchmen in 1917 which had confessed that the churches had failed to stand up for the supremacy of justice rather than power in international relations, this motive dominated in Söderblom's messages. I find this one of the most impressive and abiding elements in his spirituality. This man from a neutral country felt more deeply, more existentially, how the war itself and the all too easy acceptance of the fact of war by the churches contradicted the very essence of the Gospel and the nature of the Church of Christ. Whatever else we may say about Söderblom, this we must all concede that his ecumenical concern was clearly and firmly rooted in this conviction that the Church was called to *metanoia*, to a turning away from its failures and a turning anew to its Lord. It was therefore natural that the Stockholm message included the clear statement that " the call of the present hour to the Church should be repentance ".

Now how did the leaders of Life and Work conceive of the better obedience which churches conscious of their calling would manifest? I think that the clearest answer to this question is found in the Latin title of the Conference, *Communio in serviendo ecumenica*, which appeared on the official invitations. For here we have the two complementary objectives: the restoration of fellowship between the churches and the fulfilment of the mission of the Church as the servant-church. The fellowship or unity is qualified by the second objective. It is a fellowship which consists in and grows through the common action in and for the world. Similarly the service or social action is qualified by the first objective. It is rooted in the *communio*, that is, in the common allegiance to the common Lord Jesus Christ.

But while the two objectives cannot be separated, each can receive greater or lesser emphasis. And this is what actually happened. It seems to me quite clear that for Söderblom and indeed for most Christians on the continent of Europe, the primary motive was the motive of unity. When Father Pribilla had expressed doubt about the purity of Söderblom's motivation, Söderblom replied: " I know the motives of this man " ... and the key phrase of the page which describes his deepest intentions speaks of his profound sorrow at the impotence of the churches in the war and of the enmity expressed in their utterances, and continues: " I have asked with anxiety whether our unity in God and Christ is not deeper than any other unity." [4] Söderblom certainly had a deep interest in the social task of the churches. He had shown this as far back as 1896 when he visited the Evangelical-Social Congress at Erfurt. But his specific and unique charisma had to do with Church unity.

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[4] NATHAN SÖDERBLOM: *Pater Max Pribilla und die Ökumenische Erweckung: einige Randbemerkungen.* Uppsala : Almquist & Wiksells, 1931, p. 61.

On the other hand many of the Anglo-Saxon participants in Life and Work put the accent on social ethics. Unity for them seemed to be just a means to perform the task of the Church in society. The two different emphases even found expression in the terminology concerning Stockholm. The Germans spoke of *Die ökumenische Konferenz* (not about *Praktisches Christentum*). The Anglo-Saxons spoke about " Life and Work ".

It was therefore by no means easy to explain to the churches and the public in general what the Stockholm Conference was meant to be and to do. And it must be said that the organizers created additional difficulties for themselves. Take for example the famous expression: " a Nicaea of ethics ". I do not know who invented this title. Perhaps Söderblom himself, for it appears in his book Christian Fellowship.[5] As the year 1925, the year of the 1600th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, approached, it was used more and more. At the Conference itself even the Eastern Orthodox prelates compared Stockholm with Nicaea. Adolf Deissmann showed in a sober article in 1926 that the differences between Stockholm and Nicaea were much greater than the correspondence. But in the meantime large numbers of people had received the wrong impression that Stockholm would speak with full ecclesiastical authority on the great moral and social problems of the time.

The " as if " principle

The other misleading impression was created by two slogans used to distinguish Life and Work from Faith and Order. One of these was the formula " Service unites — doctrine divides ", introduced into the ecumenical discussion by Dr Kapler of Germany. The error was of course to *oppose* service and doctrine. Yes, common service could unite, but experience was to prove that common service would raise doctrinal issues and that an honest tackling of these issues would become a condition for any real cooperation and any real fellowship.

Another expression became even more important. Söderblom had been delighted to find in the report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's commission on Christianity and Industrial Problems, published in 1918, the following sentence: " We say deliberately that in the region of moral or social questions we desire all Christians to begin at once to act together, as if they were one body, in one visible fellowship. This could be done without any injury to theological principles." The statement had all the more weight since the chairman of this commission was (as Söderblom put it) " the venerable prelate, Bishop Talbot of Winchester ", and Talbot was a prominent Anglo-Catholic who could not possibly be accused of theological or doctrinal indifferentism.

It was therefore not surprising that when Söderblom presented for the first time his plan concerning the formation of " an ecumenical council represen-

[5] NATHAN SÖDERBLOM: *Christian Fellowship or the United Life and Work of Christendom*. New York, London: Fleming H. Revell, 1923.

ting Christendom in a spiritual way ", at Oud-Wassenaer in 1919, he quoted these sentences from the Anglican report. Then again in 1922 when the committee preparing for Stockholm met in Helsingborg with Söderblom in the chair and had to define its attitude to the Faith and Order movement, the same statement was used in a letter to the Faith and Order officers. It was obviously hoped that Brent and Gardiner, being Anglicans themselves, would be impressed by the words of Bishop Talbot. In 1927 at the Faith and Order Conference in Lausanne the " as if " principle appeared in the first and second drafts of the report of the section dealing with " The unity of Christendom and the relation thereto of the existing churches ". It seems to me obvious that the insertion of the phrase was due to Söderblom who presided over that section. Since there was some opposition to its acceptance, this draft was referred back to the Continuation Committee. But Söderblom continued to quote the paragraph concerned until the end of his life.[6]

I have always felt that this type of apologia for Life and Work has done more harm than good.[7] For to say: " act *as if all* Christians were one body " can be taken to mean that the ecumenical movement is based on a fiction rather than upon a reality. This interpretation was all the more probable since it seemed to be in line with certain new trends of philosophy such as Professor Vaihinger's philosophy of the " as if " which its creator described as a system of the theoretical, practical and religious fictions of humanity. Some statements of Wilfred Monod seemed to point in that direction, for example, when he said in his report to Stockholm: " We had recourse to the method advocated in psychology and spirituality. Act as if ... go forward as if the Church of Christ here on earth were actually a united front. "

I do not think that the Anglican writers of the report of 1918 or Söderblom himself really had in mind this interpretation. They surely did not want to say to the churches: " Let us pretend to be one." What they wanted to say was simply: " In spite of our doctrinal disagreements we can in the realm of social ethics act as one body." In fact that is what the Constantinople Encyclical of 1920 had said. And Söderblom had often made the same point. The official invitation to the Stockholm Conference had also spoken of a unity which would enable the churches to work together in applying Christian principles. And the conference message did not speak of a hypothetical or fictional unity, but of the common faith and the experience of the unity in Christ. So there was really no need for the " as if " principle, which as we will see later on created such deep misunderstanding.

Success despite difficult programme

The programme of the Conference was not a help but rather a hindrance to the fulfilment of its purpose. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Con-

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[6] NATHAN SÖDERBLOM: *The Church and Peace*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929.

[7] I said so in *The Church and its Function in Society*, written with J. H. OLDHAM, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1937). See also W. A. VISSER 'T HOOFT: *The Pressure of Our Common Calling*. New York and London: SCM Press, 1959.

ference was successful in spite of its organization and structure. Is that an unfair judgment by one who forgets that Stockholm was the very first ecumenical meeting of church delegates and did not have the advantage of all the experience gained at many later world conferences and assemblies? I do not think so, for already in Stockholm the programme was criticized. Siegmund Schultze reported that the general secretary of the Conference, Henry Atkinson, had complained on the first day that one hundred and ninety speakers had been invited to give addresses. Speaking at the closing meeting on behalf of the British delegation, the Archbishop of Dublin said that the multiplicity of topics, the inexhaustible supply of speakers, the short time allotted to the speakers and especially the lack of a real dialogue had created difficulties which seemed to be inevitable in this kind of meeting. He felt that the encounters of delegates outside the conference hall had been the best part of the meeting.

It was indeed an inhuman programme. On the day I made my ecumenical maiden speech there were twenty speakers before me and twelve after me. And these speeches were with few exceptions prepared speeches, so that there was no spontaneous reaction to viewpoints already expressed. It must be added that the commission reports which had been drawn up just before the meeting and circulated to the delegates were not officially submitted for action by the Conference, so that they were neither received nor commended to the churches and were not even printed in the English edition of the official report. The only document voted upon was " The message " and the only resolution voted upon was the one concerning the Continuation Committee.

It is not easy to determine how it came about that the Conference programme became such a straitjacket. To say that that was at the time the only known way of organizing large meetings is not an adequate explanation, for the idea that it was through spontaneous dialogue rather than through a series of monologues that understanding between Christians could be advanced was already in the air. In the year of the Stockholm Conference I was myself involved in the preparation of the World Conference of the YMCAs to be held in Helsinki in 1926, and it had already been decided to break up that gathering into 50 discussion groups of about 30 members each in order to arrive at a real exchange of thought and experience. It seems to me more probable that two other factors explain the overloading and prefabrication of the programme. The first is that during the last phase of preparation the Conference was organized from several centres and notably from the Swedish secretariat and the secretariat in the USA (later in Geneva). It would seem that the various centres were not always in step with each other and so it is likely that more speakers were invited than would have been invited if one office had had the exclusive right to do so. Is that not why Atkinson complained, as I have indicated?

But was there not also a fear that spontaneous discussion would create explosive situations? The Conference committee had agreed that the very

thorny theme: " The purpose of God for humanity and the duty of the Church " would be treated in several addresses on the first day, but that these addresses would not be followed by discussion. This was in the circumstances probably a wise decision, for a general discussion would almost certainly have led to a thoroughly theological debate which at this early stage could well have had a very divisive effect. The Conference rule that speakers who wanted to take part in the discussion of the following days would have to announce themselves on the afternoon of the preceding day was also a sort of insurance against unforeseen conflicts. At this point we may be inclined to become unjust and to smile at the extreme prudence of the Conference leaders, but we must not forget that they were really advancing in unknown territory and that the situation, just after the great war, was indeed full of explosive possibilities.

Paradox and polarization

With regard to the subject matter of the Conference, it is surprising to find that several of the themes which were to become the dominating themes of the 1930s were hardly mentioned or not treated at all. I am thinking of the issue of colonialism and especially of the challenge of Marxism. There were of course references in a number of addresses to the sufferings of Christians in Russia and an impressive service was held in commemoration of Patriarch Tichon who had reached the end of his many afflictions in April 1925. But there was no awareness that Marxism required new answers from the Christian churches. The Christian thinkers who had understood this and were struggling with the thought of Karl Marx were in 1925 still outsiders. This leads to a more general remark about the attendance. It was of course inevitable that the majority of the delegates would be church officials. For if a church decided to participate officially in this new adventure of an ecumenical encounter its responsible leaders would want to get a first-hand impression of the new movement. But this had two disadvantages. First, there were far too few laymen among the delegates and among the speakers. There were fortunately men like Lord Parmoor, who had represented the United Kingdom in the League of Nations and President Simons who presided over the highest court of justice in Germany. But these were exceptions. Most of the speaking about the concrete social and international problems was done by men who could not claim to have professional experience in this field.

But there was another disadvantage. The Stockholm Conference happened to take place at a time when a great change in the theological climate was beginning to take place. In several countries younger theologians had begun to react sharply against the positions of the older, established theologians. Before long, these younger men would be the leaders. But they were not at Stockholm. They were not yet sufficiently known or they were considered to be trouble-makers.

And so, the paradox of Stockholm was that while it tried to be an occasion of renewal, it seemed to many of the young to be the confirmation of a

rapidly passing era of church life. One wonders what Stockholm would have been like if the men who were to be the leaders of thought in the 1930s, but who were already making their first contributions in 1925, had been there. I think of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr, C. H. Dodd and Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, Paul Tillich and Gogarten, Nicolai Berdyaev and Sergius Bulgakov, Pierre Maury and André Philip. (Scandinavians are invited to fill in appropriate Scandinavian names, which they know better than I.) I do not mention Dietrich Bonhoeffer because he was at that time a student 19 years old. Perhaps the Conference would have become even more difficult and chaotic. But it would have been closer to the deeper spiritual currents of the time and it would have been easier to make the connection between Stockholm and the younger generation.

The Letter of Invitation had said: " In our deliberations we do not propose to deal with matters of Faith and Order, although we are not unmindful of their importance." But the opening sermon and the first six addresses all sought to answer the question concerning the true foundation of social ethics and therefore entered deeply into the domain of theology. These addresses contradicted each other at many important points, and it was consequently a rather disconcerting experience to find that there was no provision for discussion of these fundamental issues either in the plenary meetings or in smaller groups. So the polarization concerning the relation between the Kingdom of God and history was not brought under control and became stronger all the time. Surprise but also irritation on the part of German theologians when they heard American or British delegates speak about the setting up of the Kingdom of God, signs of which were already visible in the League of Nations; but also pained astonishment among Anglo-Saxon delegates when they heard it said that " the establishment of peaceful and human conditions cannot be considered as the condition for the speedy coming of God's Kingdom ".[8]

So the uncontrolled polarization led inevitably to tremendous generalizations and irresponsible caricature. The easiest way to dismiss the position of the other party was of course to describe them as the victims of non-theological factors. But this could have a boomerang effect. " You are a pessimist, because you are poor and defeated " could be answered by: " You are an optimist because you have won and you belong to an affluent society."

The Message

In those circumstances it was a very considerable achievement that the Conference could agree on a common message. To appreciate that message we must of course not read it in the light of later ecumenical history. Its importance lies in a few simple statements which may seem to us commonplace, but which had not been made before by the churches together and

[8] Superintendent Klingemann, in: *Stockholm Official Report.* Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1926.

could provide the starting point for far-reaching new developments. And in spite of all fear of theological controversy these statements were of course theological in nature. I think especially of the five following common affirmations contained in the Message: (1) that the call of the hour to the Church is a call to repentance; (2) that the churches should accept the urgent duty of applying the Gospel of Christ in all realms of life—industrial, political and international; (3) that the delegates realized afresh their common faith and experienced as never before the unity of the Church of Christ; (4) that the Church is by nature universal; and (5) that in the crucified and risen Lord alone lies the hope of the world. It was of course true that the Message was exceedingly vague about the concrete issues of social and international life. But it was not a small thing that the delegates from all these churches which had so largely neglected their social task and which had lived in isolation from each other now took at least the necessary first steps towards a better obedience.

I must now turn to the question as to which image the churches received of the Conference and how this image was appreciated. It is a striking fact that there were so many different images. Stockholm was interpreted as a success and as a failure; as a great witness to the social significance of the Church and as a manifestation of its irrelevance to society; as a tremendous step forward towards church unity and as a demonstration that church unity was a utopian dream. The diversity of images was of course largely due to the fact that there was so little objective material which could be taken as fully representative of the meeting. In fact there was only the Message of the Conference and the decision to form a Continuation Committee. So there was unlimited opportunity for subjective opinions about the spirit of the meeting, about the dominating theology or ideology or about the relative influence of various nations or confessions.

Since it is not possible to analyse all of these images I will just select one, namely the image which we find in Roman Catholic literature, for, as we will see, this determined to a large extent the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement during the following decades.

" A fantastic caricature "

The first full Roman Catholic study of the Stockholm Conference was the book by Professor Charles Journet of Fribourg (later Cardinal Journet) *L'union des Eglises et le christianisme pratique.*[9] It is remarkable that it went through many editions.

It is a disconcerting book. For this exceedingly competent and learned theologian speaks in many places with the accents of very cheap polemics. And what is worse, he bases his condemnation of the underlying theology of

[9] CHARLES JOURNET: *L'union des Eglises et le christianisme pratique.* Paris: B. Grasset, 1927.

Stockholm on the evidence of two or three men without asking whether the views of these men could be taken to represent the Conference as a whole. The star witnesses are Elie Gounelle and Wilfred Monod of France. Journet does not even try to analyse the motivation of Söderblom himself and does not make use of Söderblom's writings. So he becomes a " terrible simplificateur ". For instead of describing the complicated spiritual chemistry of a meeting between delegates representing so many different churches, confessions and theologians, he takes the easy solution of studying only the interpretation given by the French advocates of " christianisme social " and of proving with merciless scholastic logic that Stockholm's liberal pragmatism is a denial of the objectivity of the revealed truth and leads to pure indifferentism. For what Journet calls Stockholm's " concessionism ", its spirit of compromise with regard to doctrine, was according to him premeditated and systematic. Had not Wilfred Monod written that Stockholm had applied the " as if " method and that therefore the churches could go ahead " as if " they formed a single front?

But that meant that Stockhom stood for a purely verbal unity. What folly to trust in words rather than in the reality they reflect.

Journet obviously thought that he had discovered the root of the matter. But had he? Of course not. The " as if " approach which was for Söderblom just one possible way of stating the practical purpose of Stockholm had been rather rashly interpreted by Monod as a general method of procedure and Journet now used this concept as decisive evidence that Stockholm stood for a " spiritualism without dogma, without a backbone ".

So the image of Stockholm given to the Roman Catholic world was that of a meeting which had practically organized a clearance sale of Christianity. Söderblom had therefore ample reason to say in his answer to Journet: " It is obvious that this is a fantastic caricature."

In the year 1928 the Vatican felt that the time had come for an official pronouncement on the ecumenical movement and issued the Encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, which contained a surprisingly sharp rejection of the ecumenical movement. An analysis of the document shows that the Vatican was not only concerned about the response which the Stockholm and Lausanne Conferences had received. There was also the need to answer the appeal made by the Constantinople Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1920. The word " pan-Christian " which the Encyclical uses for the ecumenical movement is obviously taken from Eastern Orthodox usage. Again as the discussion concerning fundamental articles and concerning the papacy shows, the Encyclical seeks to clear up the confusion created by the Malines Conversations with Anglicans. Moreover—and this has not been generally understood—the reference to meetings of Christians with " unbelievers of every kind " is almost certainly a reaction to the announcement by the Church Peace Union in 1925 that a Universal Religious Peace Conference would be held in the near future. The fact that a number of the leaders of the

Stockholm Conference and especially Henry Atkinson, the General Secretary of Life and Work, were the active promoters of this inter-religious meeting had obviously created the impression in the Vatican that the ultimate purpose of the ecumenical movement was inter-religious rather than Christian unity.

But the chief theme of the Encyclical was obviously the ecumenical movement as represented by Life and Work and Faith and Order. And it is quite clear that the author or authors of the document in describing and evaluating the ecumenical movement used Journet's book as their main source of information, apparently being convinced that it gave a reliable and adequate interpretation of its nature and purpose. And it was of course inevitable that *this* ecumenical movement, this extreme form of the very modernism which Rome had condemned at the beginning of the century, this movement tainted by indifferentism and relativism should be condemned in no uncertain manner.

Roman Catholic understanding delayed

Mortalium Animos caused a great deal of surprise among the churches which had participated in the Stockholm Conference. The ecumenical movement as described by the Encyclical seemed to be completely different from the movement which the delegates to the Stockholm (and Lausanne) Conferences had come to know. Few would deny that the movement had its weak points and its dangers. We have noted several of these. It would therefore have been quite natural if the Vatican had taken the attitude: " Take care. This movement has not yet clarified its fundamental principles. We cannot enter into dialogue with it until it takes a clearer stand." In fact such an attitude would have been helpful. Unfortunately *Mortalium Animos* was not a warning; it was a condemnation and a condemnation based on unreliable testimony.

That is why it took so very long to create a new situation between the R. C. Church and the ecumenical movement. After the Stockholm and Lausanne Conferences the Jesuit Pribilla published his very thorough study of the ecumenical movement which showed much deeper understanding of the movement and did not use the aggressive tone of Journet.[10] But it was inevitable that the official picture given by *Mortalium Animos* continued to dominate in R. C. literature. And when Yves Congar published his very original and widely influential *Chrétiens désunis* [11] just before the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences of 1937 (with an English translation appearing *after* these meetings) he gave an interpretation of what he called the " ideology of Stockholm " which was still largely based on Journet's book. Many years later, in 1964, Congar was to make a generous *amende honorable*, saying that

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[10] MAX PRIBILLA, *op. cit.*

[11] YVES CONGAR: *Chrétiens désunis: principes d'un œcuménisme catholique.* Paris: Cerf, 1937.

he had depended too much on Journet and therefore not perceived the positive significance of the Life and Work approach.

I have dealt at some length with the negative reactions to Stockholm in the Roman Catholic Church because they had such a very important bearing on the ecumenical development in the following three or four decades. But I must underline again that it was by no means only in R. C. circles that Stockholm met with rough and even unfair treatment. We know how difficult it is for a new theological generation to be fair to its predecessors. The generation that took over most of the theological platform around 1930, and to which I belong myself, reacted in a particularly sharp way against the generation of the Stockholm fathers. We know from the published correspondence of Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen that Barth spoke in extremely sarcastic terms about the Stockholm meeting. It is all the more interesting and perhaps not sufficiently known that some thirty years later Barth recognized that Stockholm had played a significant role in that general turning of the Church to the world *(Zuwendung der Kirche zur Welt)*, which seemed to him one of the most promising signs of the times. Barth quotes Söderblom's definition of the purpose of Life and Work to show that the ecumenical movement understood from the outset that its motivation should not be: unity for the sake of unity, but: unity for the sake of the Church's mission to the world.[12]

Turning point in Church history

It seems to me that we have thus reached the point at which we can summarize our conclusions. They can be stated in four points:

1. Stockholm 1925 was the first large-scale attempt to get separated and isolated churches of many countries to collaborate on common tasks. Because this approach was quite unprecedented there was a certain confusion concerning its theological rationale. But during the following decades it became increasingly clear that the pioneers of the Life and Work idea—the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Nathan Söderblom, the Swiss churches, the Federal Council in the USA—had shown the way forward. It is remarkable that forty years after Stockholm one of the clearest statements concerning ecumenical cooperation in service to the world was made by the Second Vatican Council in the Decree on Ecumenism (II:12): " Cooperation among Christians vividly expresses that bond which already unites them, and it sets in clearer relief the features of Christ the Servant ... Through such cooperation all believers in Christ are able to learn easily how they can understand each other better and esteem each other more and how the road to the unity of Christians may be made smooth." Söderblom would have been happy to hear these phrases, for they express exactly what he had in mind.

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[12] *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV: 3, first part. Zollikon, Switzerland: Evangelischer Verlag, 1955.

2. In the second place Stockholm 1925 was in this respect a turning point in church history, in that the churches said together clearly that in the presence of the Cross they accepted the urgent duty of applying the Gospel of Christ in all realms of human life—industrial, social, political and international (Message of the Conference). After a long period in which Christians had accepted to live in two worlds, the world of the individual soul where religion was at home and the world of society where the laws of politics and economics exercised their sovereignty, the churches again became aware of their prophetic mandate. Their witness was as yet hesitant and uncertain. And it would take a very long time before church members would accept this insight that the Church should be concerned with the issues of social and political life. In fact even today, half a century later, the struggle to mobilize the churches for their task in the world is not yet over. There is still in many places a nostalgia for a spirituality based on the idea that religion has its throne in the heart of the individual and that for the Church to deal with social and political questions is to tarnish its purity. But if the ecumenical movement remains true to itself, it will never be able to give up the claim that Christ is Lord of all.

If since 1925 the churches and their theologians have faced the fundamental questions concerning the relation of the Church to the world in a much deeper and more biblical way than before that date, this is in no small measure due to the process of thought and dialogue which began at Stockholm.

And it is owing to the same process that we find today laymen in all walks of life who expect that the churches will help them to solve the vital moral issues underlying their professional activity with which they are confronted. This was recently illustrated by the fact that the nuclear scientists who met in Sigtuna (Sweden) under the auspices of the World Council's Committee on Church and Society and who faced the extraordinarily difficult problems of the right use of nuclear energy said in their report that they considered the holding of their meeting a worthy manner of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work.

3. The 1925 Conference was also significant in that it included both churches of the East and churches of the West. For in this way it was made clear from the outset that the ecumenical movement intended to embrace all Christian churches and, as Söderblom said, now that the churches who were often called the Johannine churches and those who were often called Pauline had met together, there was more reason to hope that the church called Petrine would join them at some future date. It is difficult for us today to understand fully how much courage and imagination it took in 1925 to bring East and West together and how much we owe therefore to Söderblom and Germanos of Thyateira who were the artisans of this encounter. The ecumenical movement would not have become truly ecumenical if they had not persistently prepared the ground for this first large-scale meeting between eastern and western Christians after nearly a thousand years of separation.

4. Finally, by creating a Continuation Committee Stockholm took a first step towards the formation of a more permanent ecumenical organization of the churches. The Continuation Committee was of course not the " ecumenical council representing Christendom in a spiritual way " which Söderblom had proposed in 1919. For it was set up by the Conference and not by the churches themselves and had no clearly defined mandate. But it proved to be an organization in which the churches could learn to work together. Through its Social Institute, proposed by Bishop Billing, first directed by Adolf Keller and then by Hanns Schönfeld and Nils Ehrenström, with the energetic help of J. H. Oldham it laid the foundations for the very substantial Oxford Conference on Life and Work. Under George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, it played an important role in the church struggle in Germany. And it could in 1937 offer its experience and heritage to the new World Council of Churches which was formed out of Life and Work and Faith and Order, and which would correspond much more nearly to Söderblom's original plan.

It seems to me, therefore, that we have good reason to be grateful for the achievement of our fathers whose prayers, whose imagination, whose energy made the Stockholm Conference possible. We can show our gratitude best by ensuring that our communion takes the form of common service to humanity and that our common service builds true communion among us.

Christian unity and the Kingdom of God

JAN CARDINAL WILLEBRANDS

The theme chosen for this service of thanksgiving, " Christian life and work 50 years after Stockholm 1925 ", seems to me very appropriate. Our thanksgiving should not only be expressed in words, nor should it limit itself merely to looking back on what happened 50 years ago. It should at the same time seek fresh inspiration and renewed dedication for the future. We thank God for the vision and leadership of Nathan Söderblom, who guided and inspired a great deal of the Christian world, especially in Europe, during and after the first World War and who still has something to say to the Christian world today.

The ecclesiological ideal at the foundations of all the indefatigable efforts of Nathan Söderblom was the search for a true and authentic catholicity. When a conference of churches was envisaged, he insisted that all the churches be invited, even if there was little hope that all would accept the invitation. It was his conviction that if a church was not represented at an assembly, this should be the consequence of a deliberate decision by that church. From this strong ecclesiological conviction the decision was made, on 11 August 1920, that all Christian churches should be invited to the international conference being envisaged. Today this seems quite normal; at that time, it was certainly a courageous decision, which has rightly been described as " one of the great victories of the ecumenical movement." [1,2]

Endeavours for peace

The conditions of his own time profoundly influenced the evolution of Söderblom's ideas about peace as a Christian ideal to be realized among the nations, about the necessity of Christian unity in the perspective of the Kingdom of God.

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[1] RUTH ROUSE AND STEPHEN CHARLES NEILL (editors): *A History of the Ecumenical Movement.* London: SPCK, 1967, p. 538.

[2] BENGT SUNDKLER: *Nathan Söderblom.* Lund: Gleerups, 1968, p. 250-251.

As we look back upon the period of the first World War, we see the figure of Söderblom, the leading churchman in the northern countries of Europe. Amidst hopes and reverses, a feeling of Christian duty impelled him to ceaseless activity. Already in November 1914 he launched his Appeal for Peace, which can be considered as the starting point of the Life and Work movement.

In 1917, when the desire for peace grew stronger among political leaders as well as in the churches, Söderblom envisaged the convocation of a Conference of Christian Churches for Peace. He was encouraged by the creation, in the same year, of the British Council for promoting an International Christian Meeting. When he had sent out the invitations, however, the churches in the belligerent countries withdrew, declaring that they had no authority to engage themselves in such initiatives. From the Roman Catholic side, Söderblom received two answers: at that time, theological reflection on both sides had not yet laid the foundation for ecumenical understanding and cooperation, nor did a previously concerted parallel action for peace exist. Thus, the reply of Cardinal Hartmann, Archbishop of Cologne, merely stated that Catholics should align themselves with the endeavours for peace of Pope Benedict XV. Another reply, a more encouraging one, came from Alexander Kokowski, Archbishop of Warsaw, who quoted in his letter the Word of the Lord: " *mandatum novum do vobis, ut diligatis invicem* ", adding: " May the Almighty bless your work and allow you to harvest the fruits of your seed ".[3]

Unity first

Despite these reverses and in the very face of them we see Söderblom organizing in December 1917 at Uppsala, a Neutral Church Conference, with the representatives of non-belligerent countries: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland. The themes of this Conference show the orientation of Söderblom's thought: (1) the unity of Christians; (2) Christians and the life of society; (3) Christians and international law. Are we not justified in recognizing in the order of these themes of the Conference—unity of Christians put first—and in their content—Christian responsibility and witness in society—the light and inspiration of the Spirit? These indeed became the fundamental themes of the Stockholm and Oxford Conferences. I am not unmindful of the more obscure aspects and even failures in Söderblom's thought and action, in which from time to time a strong anti-Roman sentiment manifests itself. (The author of the best informed and brilliant book on his life and work speaks of " an unconscious caricature " of the Roman Catholic Church.) In Söderblom's time, the Roman Catholic Church was deeply engaged in what was known as the struggle with the principles of modernism. In spite of this, and in spite of the historical conditions, which necessarily limit every human existence, with its insights and efforts, Bengt

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

Sundkler could rightly state: " Some of the most constructive ecumenical initiatives of recent years, with regard to the World Council of Churches and to the Vatican, have some relation to Söderblom's contribution." [4] Whatever may have been the immediate and visible results, we have reason to be thankful for this light which was poured out, even if its illumination varied in form and strength, like the northern lights themselves.

In a talk given to his Lutheran brethren at the Philadelphia Seminary in 1923, when speaking on the Nicene Creed, Söderblom said: " The Unity and Catholicity of the Church is not something to be achieved by men. It exists through God's creation." [5] It is in this sense that Nils Karlström analyses the idea of Söderblom: " The Unity of Christians is a unity which is basically religious." Unity is not to be sought for in anything external, anything we human beings can create. It is wholly and completely God's own act in and through Christ. The Cross of Christ is the very centre of unity, a power able to unite people in spite of all differences. Unity is not uniformity, it is unity in diversity. It respects the independence of various Church bodies, each historically conditioned in regard to its own nature and its own special tasks. Christian unity is considered as a unity in life and proclamation. Unity does not exist for its own sake. It must be transformed into Christian action in the various domains of human life." [6]

One in soul and body

We find here clearly the reflections of Söderblom on the Church as a living organism, as a religious community in which he distinguishes the body and the soul. [7] These reflections belong to the problems of Faith and Order. Yet they underlie all his activities and programmes in the field of Life and Work. Söderblom never created a theological system. He made his pronouncements in concrete situations. The conditions in which the question of unity is moved today, fifty years later, have changed in many ways. The problems of the churches and the needs of the human community have become so urgent that many Christians and even their churches are tempted to withdraw from the search and struggle for the unity of the Church to devote themselves to the immediate problems. Söderblom, who was surely more impressed by action and love than by intellectual arguments, reminds us of the obligation and the necessity to strive always for the unity of the Church, in obedience to Christ and in service to the human community. Out of his constant concern about Christian unity, he gave serious attention to the studies made by the German Jesuit Max Pribilla on the Stockholm Conference and admitted that the distinction between *fides quae creditur* (the doctrine of faith) and *fides qua*

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[4] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 262.

[6] Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 527.

[7] Bengt Sundkler, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

creditur (the act of the believers), which corresponded in some way to his distinction of the body and the soul of the Church, did not solve the theological problem of unity in diversity [8, 9, 10].

Perhaps I dwelt too long on the problem of unity. Was not Christian social concern the programme of the Stockholm Conference? Has this Conference not been criticized, especially from Roman Catholic side, as having no theology, liberalism without a creed? [11, 12, 13]. If we discern in the often confused ideas and phraseology—unavoidable at the beginnings of a new epoch—a new movement, which seeks its ways and only begins to recognize its final goal, if we discern in these beginnings the profound and real intentions of the initiators and promoters, we must acknowledge that it was not liberalism or indifferentism which they sought and promoted, but the realization of the Kingdom of God through the unity of all Christians in the Church of Christ, one in soul and body.

Söderblom himself wrote: " The main issue of the Ecumenical Conference was not printed in the programme." [14] The main issue dramatically present at the very heart of the discussions and underlying all that came out of the Conference was " the Kingdom of God on earth ".

The problem revealed itself in all its complexity 50 years ago at the Stockholm Conference. It accompanies and challenges us even today, in an ecumenical movement which manifests itself under different conditions, in different forms and with differing preoccupations. We still must clarify our understanding of, and reach out to secure, the paradox of the universal ecclesial community within the universal human society.

In our thanksgiving for the development and progress which the Lord of Ages has enabled us to achieve by his grace, let us be ever mindful of those who went before us to lay the foundation, who prayed earnestly before us and who still pray with us in this service of thanksgiving.

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[8] Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 527.

[9] " Erzbischof Söderblom und der römische Stuhl." In *Die Hochkirche*, Vol. 14 July/August 1932, p. 227.

[10] Yves Congar: *Chrétiens désunis: principes d'un œcuménisme catholique.* Paris: Cerf, 1937, p. 158, n. 1.

[11] Charles Journet: *L'union des Eglises et le christianisme pratique.* Paris: B. Grasset, 1927.

[12] Yves Congar, *op. cit.*

[13] Max Pribilla: *Um kirchliche Einheit.* Freiburg in Br.: Herder, 1929.

[14] Bengt Sundkler, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

Christian life and work fifty years after Stockholm

PHILIP A. POTTER

Fifty years ago a new and significant page of Church history was opened in this city. It was the first meeting of representatives of the Eastern Orthodox churches and of the churches of the Reformation to consider God's purpose for humanity and the duty of the Church in relation to social, educational, economic, political and international problems. It also met with the clear aim of discovering ways and means of promoting cooperation between the churches in close association with one another.

In the circumstances of the time, this was a bold and hazardous undertaking. But the hour was matched by a man of vision and courage, Nathan Söderblom, ably backed and supported by Swedish Christians who shared his vision. For Archbishop Söderblom, what mattered fundamentally was that in a world still bruised and broken by the effects of the First World War the Church should be the means of healing, of reconciliation by being itself renewed in the worship and service of its Lord. That is why the Latin title of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work expressed the real motive and goal of that meeting: *Communio in adorando et serviendo ecumenica*, " ecumenical fellowship in worship and service ".

It is, therefore, fitting that we should celebrate this great event fifty years after in an act of worship. It is also in the spirit of our fathers who met here in expectation and hope that we should not only celebrate an event but reflect on where we are today and where we are going as heirs of the great tradition of ecumenical fellowship in and through worship and service. We can truly say with the Psalmist:

> Not to us, O Lord, not to us,
> but to thy name give glory,
>
> For the sake of thy steadfast love
> and thy faithfulness. (Ps. 115:1)

But the Psalmist goes on to remind the people of God:

> The heavens are the Lord's heavens,
> But the earth he has given to the sons of men. (Ps. 115:16)

We may well ask what we have done with our stewardship of the earth through Christian Life and Work in these fifty years.

Growth of ecumenical fellowship

First, it is a matter for joy that the whole Christian community is now engaged together in issues of Life and Work. The presence here tonight of Cardinal Willebrands, the President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church, is a clear sign of this. Fifty years ago, that great church refused to participate in the Stockholm conference, and for years after observed an attitude of cautious distance from the growing ecumenical fellowship. Thanks to the Second Vatican Council another significant page in Church history has been opened.

The Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism declares: " Before the whole world, let all Christians profess their faith in God, one and three, in the incarnate Son of God, our Redeemer and Lord. United in their efforts, and with mutual respect, let them bear witness to our common hope which does not play us false... Cooperation among all Christians vividly expresses that bond which already unites them, and it sets in clearer relief the features of Christ the Servant... Through such cooperation, all believers in Christ are able to learn easily how they can understand each other better and esteem each other more, and how the road to the unity of Christians may be made smooth." (II:12)

It is ironic to read earlier in that Decree that " there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart " (II:7), for that was precisely what Söderblom was saying for years before and after the Stockholm Conference. In the invitation to the churches to join in a World Council of Churches inaugurated in 1948, it was stated: " Our first and deepest need is not new organization, but the renewal, or rather the rebirth, of the actual churches."

It is, therefore, a matter for thanksgiving that now Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants are together seeking to discover and do God's will in Life and Work. An obvious example of this is the joint committee of the Roman Catholic Church and of the World Council of Churches on Society, Development and Peace (SODEPAX) with a jointly appointed staff and a worldwide programme since 1968.

More truly ecumenical

Secondly, while the meeting here in Stockholm in 1925 was called the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, it was only so in intention

rather than in reality. When the Stockholm Conference was being planned in 1922, one participant said: " Although the work of the Conference reaches out to the whole world, its particular concern is Europe. The healing of Europe is the healing of the world." Bold words, but words which were then easily believed, because Europe was regarded as the controlling centre of the world. At Stockholm only six persons out of the over six hundred participants came from Asia and Africa. The perspective of that conference was, therefore, a very limited one and the stark realities were not seriously faced in world perspective.

Today the situation has radically changed. The concerns of Life and Work are, in fact, global in character. Such is our interdependence as nations and peoples that we are becoming aware that what affects one part of the world affects the rest. Moreover, the concerns of Life and Work are not only global in character, but have to do with the very survival of the human race. Through the ecumenical movement, churches and Christians throughout the world are becoming actively engaged in matters of Life and Work as an essential part of their witness to the Gospel. A vivid demonstration of this fact was the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala in 1968, and the programmes which have come out of that Assembly, especially on the combat against racism, the development of peoples in justice and peace, and human rights, both personal and corporate. Christians from what is called the Third World are now playing a vital part in the ecumenical movement in these and other issues, and are enabling the movement to be truly ecumenical, that is, embracing the whole inhabited earth.

Contribution of lay experts

Thirdly, the Stockholm Conference was predominantly a meeting of church leaders and theologians, though it claimed to speak on economic, industrial, social, educational, political and international affairs. Those directly involved in those highly complex problems were not there. Of course, it was only a beginning and the Conference did have the merit of declaring once for all that the Church has an inescapable responsibility for the whole life of human beings. During these fifty years we have discovered as never before the role of the laity in the Church's witness to the world. It was the Stockholm Conference which gave the impetus to this discovery.

In 1925 Bishop Einar Billing voiced the necessity for scientific study and research on the complex issues of society and of the world. An International Christian Social Institute was set up for the purpose and for many years another Swede, Nils Ehrenström, gave extremely competent and far-seeing guidance to it and to study generally in the ecumenical movement. This study and research work has had profound consequences for the Church's understanding of its faith and of its witness to the world. I would like to mention a few:

1. The participation of eminent scientists, economists, sociologists, historians, international lawyers and politicians in Life and Work has broken down barriers which for too long separated the Church from the world. Christians have, in spite of their faith in an incarnate Lord, all too easily made neat distinctions without seeing the clear relation between grace and nature, between the spiritual and the material, between the personal and the social. The contribution of these lay experts has been, on the one hand, to force the churches to appreciate the power and complexity of the working of the natural and social orders in our world and, on the other hand, to bring out the basic theological and ethical questions which they pose and which cannot be faced or answered by generalities. It is paradoxical that these lay experts have helped us to perceive the deep spiritual and moral questions more clearly, precisely by probing and bringing out their complexity. Moreover, they have helped us to recognize, as they themselves have come to recognize, that the issues we face are inter-related and that knowledge is one when viewed in the light of the prophetic faith and the Gospel. In an age of ideologies, propaganda and specialization, when the minds of people are confused or lulled to inaction by the vast array of scientific and technological knowledge, and by the apocalyptic threats to the survival of mankind, Christian lay people have made a great contribution in enabling us to understand these concerns in their totality and in their human dimensions. This in turn has enabled us to discern more clearly our responsibility as Christians for our world.

More direct engagement with society

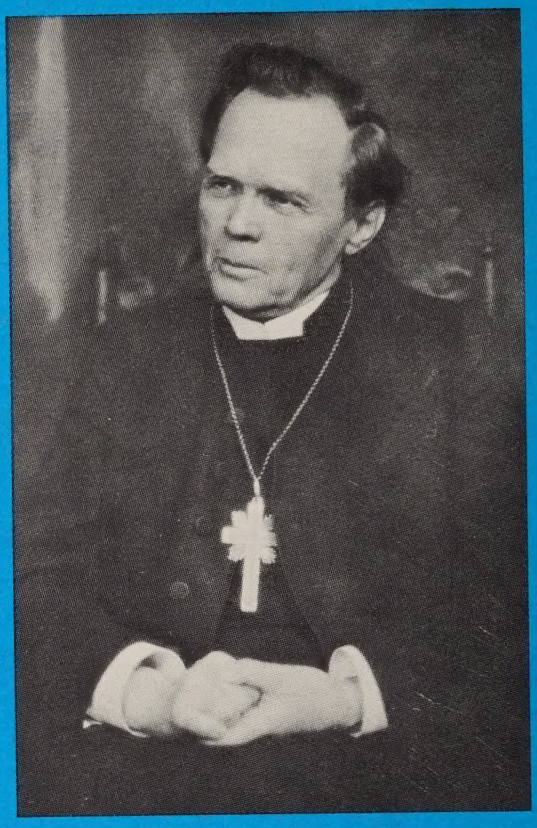
2. Theologians have often spoken about the non-theological factors which hinder the unity, renewal and witness of the churches. These non-theological factors are variously described as historical, social, tribal, racial, cultural economic, political. But when historians, sociologists, economists and political scientists have studied these realities they have demonstrated that these so-called non-theological factors disclose understandings about human nature and about society which are theological in character. Too often the churches have hidden behind what they called non-theological factors and escaped from facing their responsibility for renewal and change by shrugging their shoulders and maintaining the *status quo*. We therefore owe a great debt to those who, starting with apparently secular concerns, have brought us back to the centre of our faith.

3. At the Stockholm Conference it was felt that Christian witness should mean direct engagement with those involved in economic, industrial, racial, social and political conflicts. We have taken a long time to find ways of effecting this engagement. But in recent years, there has been a breakthrough by the churches. The programme of the World Council of Churches to combat racism has concentrated on cooperation with the racially oppressed themselves. Similarly our work in Urban and Industrial Mission and in Development has compelled us to promote people's partici-

pation and self-reliance in their own struggle for justice and a truly human existence. This new servant role of the Church has brought into sharp focus the credibility and integrity of the churches, and has provoked much controversy within the churches which cuts right across the traditional lines of confessional divisions. But the direct involvement in the lives of the poor, the oppressed, the alienated has more than anything else helped to bring the churches to the need for repentance and renewal.

Promoting wholeness

Lastly, as we reflect on these fifty years we can claim that Life and Work has played a significant role in promoting the wholeness of the ecumenical movement. It is precisely because of the insights gained in the Life and Work movement that it became possible to unite Faith and Order, Mission, and Life and Work into one World Council of Churches. Nathan Söderblom perceived this when in 1928 he wrote to Archbishop Germanos of the Ecumenical Patriarchate: " Ultimately, life, work, faith and order are expressions of an existing spiritual unity and... each requires the other for its complete fruition." For him faith and work, the inner life of prayer and the outer life of love belonged inextricably together. Our experience during these fifty years is that the unity of the Church and the unity of mankind, reconciliation with God and with one another as persons and peoples, the life of contemplation and the struggle for justice constitute the true catholicity of the Church, that wholeness of life and witness which derives from the wholeness of the Gospel and of the revelation of the triune God. That is why Söderblom could write at the time of the 1600th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea: " Reconciliation and brotherhood amongst the peoples must find a place in the creed no less than other articles of faith."

Let us therefore give thanks to God for all that was begun here in Stockholm in 1925 and for what has been happening during these fifty years. And let us dedicate ourselves anew in the power and fellowship of the Holy Spirit that we may become the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church for the sake of God's Kingdom and his righteousness.

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